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TO : The Secretary

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Principal Findings from the
Cleveland Assembly on Foreign Policy

On November 10, we participated in the Cleveland Assembly on Foreign Policy, the Department's fourth "town meeting" of 1977. It was co-sponsored by the Cleveland Council on World Affairs with the cooperation of 46 civic organizations.

Four issues were considered: (1) East-West Relations, (2) the Middle East, (3) North-South Relations, and (4) Human Rights.

The Kettering Foundation again sponsored a poll of area residents, asking questions related to the issues considered at the meeting. Poll findings of particular interest are summarized throughout this report.

In addition to the forum, attended by about 400 persons, we appeared on an hour-long live telecast featuring call-in questions from viewers on Cleveland public station WVIZ-TV. Two of us also met the evening prior to the assembly with about 150 persons of East European background to discuss their concerns about East-West relations.

Basic Impressions

The Cleveland Assembly, as well as the public television call-in program, reflected the broad interests of a community rich in ethnic diversity. Participants had a personal concern with an extensive number of other nations.

In contrast to the town meetings held earlier this fall in St. Louis and Portland, where "right-of-center" perspective was absent or muted, the spectrum of opinion was fully expressed. Nonetheless, we missed the viewpoint that might have been added, especially in discussion of economic matters, by greater participation from black Americans and representatives of labor.

As in the preceding town meetings this year, the sense of alienation from policy-makers -- a central theme of 1976 sessions -- was absent. Participants tended to debate policy options among themselves rather than taking issue with the Administration's conduct of foreign affairs. This was particularly notable in the workshop on the Middle East. Even in the meeting with East European ethnics, where we encountered great dismay with present policy, we found cordiality and confidence that we would pursue issues that had been raised.

We left Cleveland feeling that participants appreciated some of the dilemmas policy-makers face because they, themselves, had explored them in the discussions.

As in St. Louis and Portland the previous month, there was general support for the principle of human rights advocacy. But there were, also, widely divergent views on the tactics best suited to its implementation. Cleveland participants also shared the recognition of interdependence found in the earlier town meetings as well as the concern that U.S. aid promote equity and be appropriate to the level of a nation's development. Again, there was division on how best to achieve these goals.

In all three town meetings, there was an underlying assumption that U.S. economic interests play too great a role in policy determination, a criticism aimed as much at private business as at government.

We found in Cleveland the same dilemma about relations with the communist world that we have observed elsewhere: a desire for cooperative relations, especially in the avoidance of war, coupled with deep distrust of the Soviet Union's willingness to honor agreements. In Cleveland, participants expressed greater desire for a firm stance with the USSR than those attending the St. Louis and Portland town meetings had done.

Again, there was no discussion of the Panama Canal issue in the forum itself. The treaties were, however, the third most popular topic among the 129 persons who participated in the television call-in program. East-West relations was the most frequent topic, followed by the Middle East.

Eastern Europe

On the evening of November 9, two of us -- Patt Derian and George Vest -- met with representatives of Cleveland's substantial Eastern European ethnic community. They made clear to us their doubt that policy-makers shared their intense commitment to the freedom of their homelands. Moreover, they complained that those in Washington appeared more concerned about "small nations," like South Africa or Israel, than about the millions living under Soviet control.

They saw particular evidence of lessened commitment in the signing of the Helsinki accord, plans to return the crown of St. Stephen, and the "lack of conviction" in Independence Day letters to organizations representing the Baltic states.

No one suggested direct confrontation with the USSR. But it was strongly asserted that the United States has continually "lost ground" to the Soviets, made too many one-sided concessions, and been unwilling to exert sufficient pressure to gain changes in Soviet behavior. Many also saw sales of grain and technology to the East as self-defeating: At the minimum, they urged, such sales should be on a cash-only basis.

Some suggested that the United States has failed to deal strongly with the Soviets because we fear them. But the prevailing view appeared to be that economic interests have taken precedence over human concerns.

There was an apparent consensus that closer U.S. ties with Eastern European nations were desirable. But return of the crown of St. Stephen was seen as motivated by economic concerns, an unearned "reward" for negligible human rights advances, and an act that would legitimize an unelected government kept in power by Soviet troops. Participants did not accept the argument that the crown would be returned to the people of Hungary, rather than its government, and feared it might eventually be taken to Moscow.

Other specific issues were raised: Why does the United States recognize Yugoslavia as a single nation while Croats wish independence? Why does the United States protest treatment of "elite Russian dissidents" while ignoring treatment of those in the Ukraine? What has the United States done about treatment of the Hungarian minority in Romania?

Those present protested "exploitation" of Americans when they travel in Eastern Europe or send packages there. A proposal that ethnics protest excessive customs duties by refusing to send parcels to relatives in Eastern Europe was greeted with some enthusiasm. Another popular proposal was the formation of an ethnic advisory committee to consult with the Department on Eastern European policy.

Most of the views expressed in this session were reiterated the following day during assembly workshops, particularly those dealing with human rights and East-West relations.

East-West Relations

Despite the diversity of views in the workshop, there was underlying agreement on four points:

- (1) The United States must maintain its fundamental military strength.
- (2) While avoiding the danger of war, we must place pressure on the communist world to expose them to our values.
- (3) Arms agreements are desirable, but must be verifiable.
- (4) We must not concentrate on bilateral relations with communist nations, but act in concert with our European allies.

There were differences on what constituted an acceptable level of military strength from which to deal with the communist world, especially the Soviet Union. Some deeply distrusted the USSR and believed the United States is conceding too much in every area of East-West contact, including trade arrangements and technology sharing. These persons implied that the United States is also falling behind the Soviet Union in military strength which should, at the very least, be equal to that of the USSR.

Others felt we are spending too much on arms and wanted more defense funds channelled into peaceful purposes. Still others took a middle view: Maintain a strong defense while seeking ways to cooperate with the communist world.

Participants divided on recognition of mainland China. One view was that relations with the PRC had gone "dangerously downhill" since the Shanghai communique, that we should move more rapidly to formal recognition of the mainland with

Taiwan as an independent nation. The opposing view was that we must retain the status quo with Taiwan both as a moral obligation and as a symbol to other nations that we honor treaty commitments.

They also divided on Eurocommunism.

One group saw it as separate from Soviet communism, believing that national identity would prevail over political ideology with possibly encouraging effects on East European nations. This group opposed any American intervention to prevent communists from entering the French or Italian governments.

Others feared that, once voted into office, communists would not allow themselves to be voted out, posing the threat of Soviet intervention. They wanted a stronger U.S. stand, both public and private, against communist participation.

The Middle East

Most of this workshop constituted a debate between advocates of "Israel's right to survive" and advocates of "justice for the Palestinians." Participants seemed, however, to emerge with an appreciation of the complexities and dilemmas faced in arriving at a solution acceptable to all parties.

The majority engaged in a troubled questioning: Do the Arabs genuinely want peace? Who speaks for the PLO, the "moderates" in Paris or the "radicals" in Beirut? Can Israel withdraw in confidence to "indefensible" pre-1967 territory? Could Israel ever be secure with a Palestinian state on its border?

A vigorously pressed opposing view, expressed by a significant minority, was that Palestinians have a right to a homeland, one that would comprise at least part of the territory Israel has held since 1948 "when it first began to take more land than was allotted by the United Nations."

Both sides agreed that the ultimate goal in the Middle East is forging a chain of human relationships between Israelis and Arabs that would be the best guarantee of lasting peace. However, there was little exploration of short-term compromise between the two parties. Indeed, the word "negotiations" was not mentioned until the State Department representative noted its absence.

In the Kettering poll, a majority of Clevelanders thought Israel should give up part (36 percent) or all (17 percent) of the land it has controlled since 1967 "if the Arab countries were willing to sign an agreement recognizing Israel's right to live in peace." Another 16 percent thought Israel should keep all the land.

Workshop participants also touched on American interests in the Middle East. There was division between those who thought our need for oil should draw us closer to Arab positions and those who thought this should play no part in policy considerations. Both sides seemed to agree that a major American objective should be to keep the Soviets from establishing hegemony in the area.

To our surprise, there was very limited discussion about the role the United States is playing, or should play, in resolving the Middle East conflict. There was virtually no mention of what we had anticipated might be viewed as recent policy shifts. Not until the plenary session did the joint U.S.-Soviet statement arise: One speaker criticized the Administration for "bringing the Soviets back into an area where their influence was on the wane."

At the workshop, Roy Atherton asked for reactions to the suggestion often heard about a U.S. defense treaty as a guarantee of Israel's security. He made clear he was asking only for opinions, not promoting such a move. The last workshop speaker took vigorous exception, saying we should have learned from Viet-Nam not to commit American troops to the defense of nations in which we have no direct interest. After the workshop, a number of people came to Atherton to endorse this viewpoint.

North-South Relations

There was general agreement the United States should be concerned with less developed countries, both on humanitarian grounds and in the national interest. There was less agreement on how best to promote the economic health of those nations in the long-term interest of our own economic health.

Most of this discussion centered on aid. There was little mention of other types of relationships with the "Third World": trade, credits, commodities agreements, investment, or arms sales. Surprisingly, there was no mention of the impact of foreign trade on U.S. jobs. In the Kettering poll, Clevelanders cited "protecting jobs

of American workers" as their top foreign policy priority and favored protectionist trade policies by a 55-36 percent majority.

In the workshop, a vigorously pressed minority view was that aid did not matter in development: only investment, turned to reinvested profit, would produce jobs and economic growth. The majority view supported assistance, and urged that the Administration continue to give increasing priority to meeting basic human needs, with particular emphasis on small projects and technology appropriate to the development level of the country.

There was consensus that we must monitor aid more closely to assure that it actually assists the poor, not a ruling elite. There was also general agreement that we should make it clear to the American public which aid is given for political purposes and which for purely developmental reasons.

A widely shared desire that aid promote equity in the recipient society, coupled with a belief that the United States has previously used aid to dominate other governments, raised an unanswered dilemma: How do you attempt to promote equity without being interventionist?

There was a division about demands from less developed nations for a "New International Economic Order." A minority dismissed them as "idiocy," a way to blame developed nations for the LDCs' failures. The opposing point of view was that we should attempt to find common ground between Third World demands and U.S. concerns, turning confrontation into a vehicle for mutual agreement.

In the Kettering poll, a majority of Clevelanders (58 vs. 23 percent) agreed that the United States should help less developed nations improve their standards of living. However, Clevelanders placed this goal near the bottom of their scale of foreign policy priorities. Perhaps this reflects the majority view that the wrong people get aid (71 percent) and less developed countries don't know how to use aid properly (64 percent).

Human Rights

Despite general consensus that the United States should be concerned about human rights in other nations, it was clear that participants were not totally satisfied with the manner in which that concern is being expressed. However, there was no consensus on the proper implementation of human rights advocacy.

Some thought we should concentrate on promoting generally accepted principles, such as those contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They were critical of the United States' applying what one professor called "situation ethics" rather than following a consistent approach to all nations.

Others believed the tactics used should vary according to the nation involved, perhaps concentrating first those in which progress is most possible or, alternatively, on a few "examples" which would demonstrate our willingness to take firm measures with other human rights violators.

Still others wanted us to focus on specific countries, or groups within countries, in which they had a direct interest: Shia Muslims imprisoned in Iran, the rights of Greeks on Cyprus, Ukrainian dissidents, allegations of British torture in Northern Ireland, emigration of Syrian Jews, reversing the decision to return the crown of St. Stephen to Hungary.

Most participants agreed that U.S. power to effect change is limited.

They also perceived national security, business interests, and energy requirements as conflicting with the desire to promote human rights. Several offered the view, for example, that the United States would tolerate almost any behavior from an oil producer. Some urged government "disincentives" against U.S. firms dealing with repressive governments. In sum, the view was: If we cannot force change, we can -- at least -- not assist a repressive state with arms or economic benefits.

A few people suggested that our concern about violations elsewhere -- in light of domestic problems -- is hypocritical, imperialistic, or arrogant. However, most thought our own problems should not blind us to violations elsewhere; rather we should be willing to accept criticism from other nations and be more understanding of the failures of others, especially less developed nations. Labor representatives urged policymakers to place equal weight on the human rights of American workers being threatened by foreign competition as they do on the rights of workers in a competing country.

As might be expected in a human rights workshop, participants were more favorable toward criticizing violations than the general Cleveland public. A majority (51 percent) of the public supported "criticizing countries that violate human rights." But a substantial minority (38 percent) thought it was "none of our business."

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